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A REMARKABLE OATH.

IN a paper read at the last Annual Meeting, of which an abstract is given below, Mr. J. M. Le Moine mentions a peculiar oath of French Canadian voyageurs: "Tors' mon âme au bout d'un piquet," Twist my soul round a fence rail. This singular attestation appears to refer to a cruel punishment familiar in the Middle Age. In 1231, the conquerors of Prussia, the Knights of the Teutonic order, are recorded to have cruelly put to death a heathen who had made them trouble; an incision was made about the navel, which was attached to a tree, and the victim eviscerated by being led about it. Thus, says the account, one who had killed many Christians was himself cruelly destroyed; it is possible that the captive suffered the same penalty which he had himself often inflicted. In 1238, Pope Gregory IX. complains that the heathen Finns sacrificed some Christians to demons, and compelled others to circle a tree until they had lost their life (*usque ad amissionem spiritus*; the soul might thus be said to be twisted about a tree). The Pope who was so much shocked over the iniquities of the heathen does not appear to have considered the parallel proceedings of the "Knights of Christ" as worthy of reprobation. A still more exact equivalent to the idea implied in the modern oath is indicated by a chronicler, as customary among Polish populations of the twelfth century; these are said to have invented savage punishments for Christians; in some cases they eviscerated their victims by leading them round a stake (*his viscera extorserint palo circumducentes*). There can be little doubt that the French attestation represents a survival in language of an ancient custom; it is also interesting as exhibiting the fundamental correspondence of old French and German conceptions. W. Mannhardt, from whom these comparisons are borrowed, and in whose treatise will be found the proper references ("Der Baumkultus," Berlin, 1875, I. 28-31) considers that the penalty has a superstitious root, being as he thinks originally applied to injurers of trees; on the principle of *lex talionis*, he who barked a young tree, conceived as animate and sacred, was made to supply a covering out of his own life. At all events, this particular application of the punishment was recognized in the laws of German peasants, and was promulgated as an ordinance as late as 1720.

W. W. N.